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ABSTRACT

Principles and strategies for learning second languages for the purpose of effective intercultural communication are discussed, with particular reference to the teaching of English, the dominant foreign language in Denmark. In the first section, the official, relatively open-ended Danish goals for English language teaching are outlined. The second section briefly discusses the influential role of English in Denmark, and its status as a foreign or second language for most Danes. In the third section, Danish English instruction is analyzed in relation to ten specific language learning goals used in Britain to guide language teachers. It is concluded that the British guidelines reflect aspects of language instruction that are important and should be included in language teacher training and should inform daily pedagogical activity. It is recommended that Denmark re-examine the implications for language use and instruction of the important role played by English in that country. A 16-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Good learning strategies in foreign and second language learning - the case of English in Denmark

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For languages to be used, they have to be learned. The focus of this paper is on principles and strategies for learning languages, exemplified in relation to Denmark and the dominant foreign language, English.

Which language and why?

It is natural for a small country like Denmark to wish to retain its national language in full vigour. But Denmark is not a monolingual Danish-speaking country. Minority ethnic groups, 100 000 immigrants, foreign television, tourists, books, commerce - the list of contexts where a language other than Danish is used is virtually endless. Even within Danish, the importation of foreign terms for basic items of food, clothing, entertainment, technology, etc. is striking. In the contemporary world the vast majority of these are of American origin.

It is logical for a country that lives by trading to allocate a good deal of educational effort to the learning of foreign languages. In addition to instrumental purposes, which any child is likely to be aware of, school subjects such as "English" or "International Studies" can contribute to general educational development and can sensitise the learner to alien cultures. These three types of goal, utilitarian, intellectual and intercultural, apply for the entire school-going population, not just for en élite.

Which languages then? Ignoring for a moment the status quo and the fact that large numbers of teachers have been trained to teach specific languages, but bearing in mind the goals already identified, what criteria should hold when selecting foreign languages? Geographical proximity? This is less significant in a world of sattelites, video, and multinationals. What about national security, a

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decisive factor in American foreign language educational planning, which postulates linguistic and ideological understanding as supports for an internationalism explicitly tied to military, diplomatic and commercial interests spanning the entire globe (President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, 1979)? Quite apart from Danes not perceiving their national interest in these terms, even if the same factors hold, the Americans do not merit emulation in this field, as their "incompetence in foreign languages is nothing short of scandalous" (Commission report, p. 6).

One reason for American ethnocentricity and the monolingualism of the majority of the population is, of course, the fact that their mother tongue is English. In addition to being a mother tongue, English has numerous other functions. It is variously described as a world language (for instance, Pergamon's new journal), a frankly imperialist label; a language of wider understanding (Ferguson, when director of the Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, in Rice, 1962), a neo-colonialist euphemism; an international language, or a language for international communication (Brumfit 1982), a more functional categorisation; and as an international auxiliary language in the sense of a lingua franca for people with no other common language, as for instance in many third world countries where English has indigenized.

The wide use of English makes it a natural candidate for educational planners selecting foreign languages. A similar case can be made for other languages used internationally (eg. French, Arabic) or, in multilingual societies, for languages used intranationally (eg. Hindi, Swahili).

In Denmark, English ousted German as first foreign language in formal education after the Second World War, this switch reflecting a wider international orientation. Now, all Danish children learn English, nearly all learn German, and some learn French; very few learn languages other than these in school[1]. Even if Danish is one of the official languages of the European Economic Community and the European Parliament, there is a strong case for

Danes to learn English, French and German because of their instrumental value in a multitude of political, economic and cultural contexts.

An alternative approach to an internationalist one would be to focus on the languages used by the minority communities in Denmark. This approach is being seriously considered in many traditionally monolingual countries, from Europe to Australia. In Britain, a working party of the National Congress on Languages in Education has argued that instrumental, educational and cultural aims can be achieved as adequately through the study of one of the languages of a minority community in Britain as through one of the more traditionally taught languages[2]. An underlying goal in promoting minority language learning for monolingual English-speaking children, as well as the minorities themselves, is to encourage a greater appreciation of the languages and cultures which make up contemporary multicultural and multilingual Britain. Denmark has not yet realized the potential of this approach, whether for the dominated or the dominant groups.

A further criterion in selecting foreign languages is familiarity with literary masterpieces or great thinkers, the cultural heritage associated with Greek and Latin a century ago and now not so easily identified. Foreign language learning at the upper end of school in most industrialised countries professes such a goal. In Denmark, teachers are free to compile their own syllabuses, within fairly liberal limits, and many Danish 18-years-olds read Shakespeare in the original. The exercise can only be indirectly concerned with the learners' personal proficiency in English, and has more to do with educational reproduction of a specific cultural tradition, one which is increasingly being questioned. Macbeth, the most widely read play[3], may be peculiarly appropriate so far as the themes of the play are concerned, but the bond with instrumental or intercultural goals is more tenuous. The play functions as a representative of the ideological purposes of education and its qualification system - and disqualification too, as education is invariably competitive.

The goals named in the official regulations for English in Denmark are explicitly instrumental and intercultural but they are formulated in a very open-ended way. They cover:

- the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing as means of communication and self-expression of personal value
- the promotion of the wish to use the language and make progress in it
- in compulsory schooling (English from ages 11-16), becoming well-informed about the life and culture of the communities where English is spoken so as to acquire a solid foundation for international understanding; and, at the upper secondary level (16-19), insight into characteristic aspects of the culture of the countries which use English as a means of expression, particularly USA and England[4].

English - a foreign or second language?

As a preliminary step towards considering how these goals might be reached, it is necessary to consider how far English learning in Denmark is foreign language learning, or whether it is more of a second language learning situation. A foreign language can be defined as a language which has no internal functions in the relevant country and which is learned in order to communicate with native speakers or interlanguage users of the foreign language. By contrast a second language has specific functions within the community, like for instance the language of the country of residence for immigrants, or former colonial languages retained for administrative, educational or technological purposes in many third world countries. Whether a language is a foreign or second language has significant implications for pedagogy, due to the amount and type of exposure to the language and the uses to which it is put.

Danes are exposed to a great deal of English on television, in youth culture and the media generally. English is indispensable in higher education, particularly in

natural sciences and technological subjects. English words are now ubiquitous in the high street. So far as language reception (reading and hearing) is concerned, it is fair to regard English as fast becoming a second language in Denmark. Furthermore, in order to accede to positions of influence in society, by staying the course in the education system, it is also necessary to demonstrate productive mastery of the language in speaking and writing. English is one of the filters of the education system that cannot by circumvented. It is also important in many jobs. English therefore has important social functions within Danish society, in education and outside it, and in that sense can be considered a second language.

The influential status of English, and the fact that many Danes speak superb English, should not mislead one to conclude that English teaching is universally successful. Standards in the education system tend to be determined by the logic of its own traditions and exam system. They range, in the assessment of a recent Council of Europe investigating committee (admittedly after a cursory visit), from learners whose English is excellent to others who lack the ability "to fulfill even basic communicative needs when confronted with English-speaking visitors"[5]. English in Denmark has foreign and second language functions, and failure to master English is increasingly likely to be a social disadvantage.

Ten language learning goals

In order to consider the full range of components in language learning, I shall relate my analysis of English learning in Denmark to a set of aims elaborated in Britain to guide teachers of all language subjects in compulsory schooling. These aims are both more detailed and wide-ranging that the Danish ones already summarised. They explicitly acknowledge social goals in a multilingual world. The ten points cover communicative competence, learning processes, metalinguistic knowledge and language awareness, the uses of language for personal, intercultural, social, political and aesthetic purposes, and

response to a variety of art forms and media[6]. Although exemplification will be in relation to school in Britain and Denmark, the language learning strategies I shall refer to are undoubtedly of much more general validity. (NB. The numbered, italic sentences are quotations from the original source.)

1. *To use language(s) and the relevant media appropriately for academic, occupational and social purposes.*

The communicative competence of the learner is explicitly related to the demands of the education system, future professional needs, and interaction. What has to be learned is not merely linguistic competence (lexis, grammar, and phonology/orthography), but pragmatic competence, ie the speech acts, cohesion in discourse, and speech act modality in the sense of attitudinal marking, which are relevant to the socio-cultural contexts that learners should be exposed to or prepared for. A third component of interlanguage communicative competence is fluency, meaning the ability to activate one's linguistic and pragmatic competence with ease. A fourth component is strategic competence, which covers the problem-solving procedures learners resort to when there are gaps in their linguistic or pragmatic competence or when communication difficulties require a repair.

There is a terminological overlap here, because I am using the term strategy throughout the paper in the general sense of a plan, whereas strategic competence refers exclusively to communication strategies, the devices that learners have recourse to when in linguistic trouble (Færch/Kasper 1983). This is one aspect of interlanguage communication which has been intensively studied in recent years. There is empirical evidence that interlanguage based communication strategies such as paraphrase are more likely to lead to mutual understanding than mother tongue based communication strategies such as code-switching or literal translation (Haastrup/Phillipson 1983, Bialystok 1983).

There is also an increasing amount of documentation

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of learners' difficulties in handling the pragmatics of English. For instance, the brusqueness or abruptness that can characterise interlanguage users when making a request or a complaint can be due to them making the speech acts more directly than English native speakers do, using fewer routinized formulae, and structurally simpler ways of realizing a pragmatic function, and marking inadequately for politeness (German data from Kasper, 1982).

Traditionally foreign language teaching concentrated on linguistic competence. To make communicative language teaching effective, learner strategies should take learners' needs and their level of interlanguage competence as starting-points and structure the learning so that all four components of communicative competence are systematically built up.

2. *To develop intellectual skills of general application, including analysis, categorisation, comparing and contrasting, criticism, defining, drawing of inferences, logical reasoning, memorisation, scanning, skimming, summarising, synthesis.*

These intellectual skills expand the description of communicative competence by specifying some of the cognitive operations which are developed in school, in the mother tongue before other languages. Of special relevance for the learning of foreign languages are categorisation when using the forms and concepts of the new linguistic system (for example, for us interlanguage users of Scandinavian languages, a major hurdle in developing reading proficiency is compounded words); memorisation for such purposes as conscious learning or developing fluency in integrating the phonological units of the foreign language; and inferencing. Inferencing is a vital learning process, because if the language a learner is exposed to can be understood by means of rules in the learner's existing interlanguage knowledge, no learning can take place. Learning depends on the application of inferencing to input which is not immediately comprehensible and the meaning of which needs to be guessed at and puzzled out

in the light of all the available cues. You can communicate without learning, but if learning is to take place, the input has to stretch the learner's interlanguage and has to be made comprehensible by inferencing.

3. *To gain some understanding of the processes used in acquiring a language, and to apply these to the study of such further languages as may be appropriate.*

The consideration of inferencing has already led us into learning processes. In any formal (ie educational) learning situation, learners should be provided with tools and concepts to facilitate a conscious awareness of what is involved in language learning.

One possible psycholinguistic theory of language learning sees it as hypothesis formation and hypothesis testing on the basis of comprehensible input (outside and inside the classroom) and, depending on whether the feedback on the hypothesis is negative or positive, establishment and ultimately automatisation of the rules of the target language (see Færch/Haastrup/Phillipson 1983, particularly chapter 11). The inferencing of meaning is one means of hypothesis formation. Hypothesis testing may involve recourse to a dictionary, saying something in the expectation that a teacher will assess it, or actually communicating in the language. An immigrant who interacts with speakers of the language of the country of residence may learn a lot of language subconsciously, through actual use, which provides implicit feedback on the learner's hypotheses.

All learners could benefit from being made aware of the nature and function of language learning processes, as well as of the components of communicative competence. This can lead to a greater appreciation of the purpose and expected results of different types of classroom activity, and of interaction and self-help, and to learners taking more responsibility for their own learning.

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4. *To acquire knowledge of the modest collection of technical terms useful in the discussion of language.*

These technical terms should cover not only metalinguistic knowledge, which is restricted to linguistic competence, but also metacommunicative knowledge, in other words awareness of all the constituents of communicative competence. Learners should be taught to analyse which classroom learning acitivities support wich aspects of communicative competence. For instance, role play can serve to develop insight into pragmatic uses of language.

If practice, exposure to and productive use of the language, is available outside the classroom, it may be possible to avoid spending precious classroom time on it. Feedback on interlanguage (eg on errors or gaps) and consciousness-raising in relation to language is more likely to be available inside the classroom from the teacher and fellow learners. For this a small amount of metacommunicative terminology is necessary.

5. *To become aware of the diversity of language and to realize that in linguistic terms no one system of language is inferior to any other.*

This is a self-evident goal, except to ethnocentrics or linguocentrics. Any education system should work to combat prejudice, and Danish schools are officially committed to encouraging democratic and tolerant ideals. It is one of the tasks of language subjects to provide the tools for reaching this goal.

6. *To reflect personal experience and a confident sense of personal identity, self-esteem and worth.*

This sounds like a, possibly paternalistic, concern for ethnic minority groups, particularly the Afro-Caribbean speakers of Black British English, but the point is equally valid for speakers of any stigmatized sociolect or dialect, or for interlanguage speakers, who may be

judged falsely on the basis of their language (see examples in Gumperz, 1982). It is a good strategy to make learners aware of how they sound in a foreign language, as they may well do themselves less than justice. However, personal confidence is not enough if the speaker belongs to a group which is stigmatized, by another group, and it may be more important to increase the awareness and tolerance of the dominant group - in relation to ethnic minorities or interlanguage speakers - than to focus on the supposed inadequacies of the outsiders. This requires sensitive handling, and insight into the linguistic and social psychological aspects of inter-ethnic communication, because interlanguage users invariably speak a language which is formally and functionally reduced as compared with that of native speakers[7].

It can be argued that learning a foreign language may have an emancipatory effect on children from less privileged homes (for a summary see James 1979, p 9) or from confining home environments (Börsch 1982). However, as modern language learning is merely one constituent of a class-based education system this potential can be exaggerated. Paradoxically, emancipation is unlikely either in Britain, where foreign languages have a low and declining status, or in Denmark, where the second language status of English entrenches its position as an instrument of social control. These remarks apply to children fron the linguistic majority. As regards the language learning needs of ethnocultural linguistic minority groups, and a proposal for a radically different approach to foreign language learning, see Tove Skutnabb-Kangas's paper in this volume.

7. *to widen their experience of other cultures within the local community and beyond it, and to empathise with members of minority groups.*

Syllabuses in Denmark shold in principle result from a negotiation between the teacher, whose job it is to be familiar with the culture of English-speaking countries

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and representative texts, and the learner, who has the legal right to a say in what is studied. Syllabuses structured around the reading of texts on such themes as Northern Ireland, South Africa, Amerindians, the Civil Rights movement, and the National Front indicate an interest in and serve to promote empathy with minority groups in English-speaking countries. This is a valid way of coming to grips with the goal of insight into "characteristic aspects" of the culture of Britain and USA.

In addition to choosing appropriate themes or texts, it is essential, when structuring syllabuses, that attention is also paid to communicative goals, language learning processes and activities, and the suitability of particular themes or texts in relation to these.

Teachers vary greatly in how they structure their syllabuses. Some subordinate communicative competence to cultural goals, some pursue linguistic and cultural goals separately, some integrate them. Some regard empathy with minority groups as an important goal - making it more likely that Danish teenagers know more about Blacks in Britain and their cultural heritage than the Turks that they rub shoulders with in Copenhagen.

8. *to become aware of how language and the media can be deployed against objectivity, to produce stereotyping, racism and sexism.*

Most of the awareness of Danish learners of life in English-speaking countries reaches them through the filter of the media. One could therefore argue that the most important task for the school subject English is to develop an understanding of why British and American media, particularly television, have such a colossal impact on countries like Denmark and what implications this has, linguistically and culturally. In relation to learning English, they should study the processes of international cultural diffusion, the economic and technological factors which put Denmark at the receiving end of cultural imperialism.

At the upper secondary level in Danish schools, there

is a trend towards selecting themes which have an exemplary function for understanding Britain, the USA, and third world English-speaking countries. Such themes may be of general human interest, (eg mental health, evolution, the arms race, sexism); or they may be more securely anchored geographically (eg solar energy in a specific West African country, or urban revolts in Toxteth and Brixton). Themes are sometimes pursued in integration with or in parallel with work in other subjects such as geography, physics or history.

Work along such lines is likely to develop proficiency in using English while simultaneously raising awareness of the role of English in the modern world. If English is an international "auxiliary"language, who is it helping[8]?

9. *to respond sensitively to a wide variety of art forms, in addition to those which are dependent on the use of language, viz. literature and film.*

and

10. *to appreciate human achievement, aspirations and criteria of aesthetic value.*

These final points take us to the affective side of language learning, in which fiction of many kinds has an important role to play. Macbeth should not be confined to the classroom, and wrestling with the text may be a necessary prelude to a visit to the theatre. Television brings language and culture into the home, and unfortunately tends to bring passivity and a lack of discrimination with it. Response (9) and appreciation (10) are not enough for a vital culture, meaning that education should also aim at encouraging active, critical learners.

Concluding remarks

The issues touched on under these ten points, and the good learner strategies identified in relation to them, are all important in foreign and second language learning. They should be well covered in teacher training and inform

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daily pedagogic activity. While the exemplification has been in relation to English in Denmark, the principles of needs identification, learner awareness of the components of communicative competence, of language learning processes and activities and of the characteristics of developing interlanguages, syllabus negotiation, and the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning, these are principles of general validity.

In Denmark English has no trouble in legitimating itself, and is in a class of its own compared to other foreign languages. But this is not a satisfactory state of affairs. It is imperative that enough Danes learn other languages well so that contact is maintained with a range of cultures and so that international understanding is not synonymous with transnational domination. Symptomatic of the present imbalance is that while English is given massive institutional support, and German and French rather less, there is an almost total neglect of the languages of the ethnic minorities. Most parents in mixed marriages fail to bring up their children bilingually. The policy towards ethnic minorities is one of official neglect and incompetence and absence of any wish to learn from the experience of other countries. So far as bilingualism in the family is concerned, there is widespread ignorance of the issues involved, but a recent book admirably meets the need for information for the non-specialist (Saunders, 1982). Those of us who are active in foreign and second language pedagogy need to be much more active in analysing the relevance of particular strategies in relation to learning goals, so as to assist policy-making and pedagogical practice. As English is in effect becoming a second language in Denmark, it is important to be aware of the reasons for this, and to think through the implications that follow for language use, both in the education system and in society at large.

Notes:

1. 1982 figures were quoted by the Minister of Education at a languages conference reported in a special issue of the Danish journal Sproglæreren summarising the conference.
2. Report of the Working Party on The Languages of Minority Communities, National Congress on Languages in Education, February 1982. Details from the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, 20, Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AP.
3. A statistical breakdown on the most commonly read texts is made in Skydsgaard and Vesterholm, 1982.
4. Extracts from the Danish legislation plus translations into English are given in Færch, Haastrup and Phillipson, 1983, chapter 13.
5. Bergentoft, 1981, page 10.
6. The list was drawn initially from a number of official documents, notably Her Majesty's Inspectorate Working Paper of December 1977 on Curriculum 11-16, for use in a mother tongue project. It is published in Broadbent 1982.
7. For a description, see Færch, Haastrup and Phillipson, 1983, particularly chapter 17.
8. International technical and cultural cooperation of the kind sponsored by the British Council, through the medium of English, is legitimated in commercial as well as political terms, for instance by reference to "potential markets, allies or partners" (British Council Annual Report, 1981-82, page 23).

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